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MARCH 24 1981

Dear Mr. Marks:

Secretary Haig has asked me to thank you for your letter of February 19 on behalf of Brian Slike concerning reports that chemical weapons have been used in Laos and Afghanistan. I sincerely regret the delay in this reply.

For some years, the U.S. Government has been aware of these reports that chemical agents may have been used in Laos against dissident minority groups, and has sought to gather more information. By 1978, the United States had enough information to bring the matter to the attention of the Government of Laos, which denied the validity of the reports. We received the same response when we asked the Soviet and Vietnamese Governments to look into the reports and end the practice if true. In addition to our regular interviews of refugees, we sent two teams to the refugee camps in 1979 specifically to investigate this matter.

With regard to Afghanistan, there is convincing evidence that the Soviets have used both irritants and incapacitating chemical agents against the Afghan insurgents. Reports of the use of lethal chemicals are under investigation.

The U.S. Government cannot confirm or conclusively disprove reports of the use of chemical weapons in remote areas where we have no presence, such as the areas reportedly affected in Laos and Afghanistan. However, the issue is sufficiently serious and the reports significant and credible enough to warrant a thorough, impartial international inquiry. As you may know, the United Nations General Assembly on December 12, 1980, adopted a resolution establishing such an investigation. The U.S. strongly supported that effort, and we will be working to ensure it is conducted as thoroughly

The Honorable
Marc Lincoln Marks,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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as possible. Whether these particular reports are true or not, the entire international community has an interest in seeing that chemical warfare is not used.

Sincerely,

Richard Fairbanks
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosure:

Correspondence returned.